

July 13, 2015
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

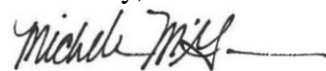
Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Native Species Coordinator - Fisheries
Region 2 - Missoula
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, Deer Lodge, MT
North Powell Conservation District, Deer Lodge, MT
Montana River Action, Bozeman MT
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, Ovando MT
Steve and Sue Graveley, Helmville MT

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project intending to restore the Devil's Dip Spring Creek stream channel, which would include reconnection to Nevada Spring Creek and attainment of complete fish passage through the restored reach. The adjacent pond and wetland areas would be isolated to reduce warm water inputs. Devil's Dip Spring Creek is a tributary to Nevada Spring Creek, which enters Nevada Creek and is in the Blackfoot River drainage. It is located about 3 miles south of the intersection of MT Highways 200 and 141 near Lincoln in Powell County.

Please submit any comments by 5:00 P.M., August 12, 2015 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,



Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
E-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Devil's Dip Spring Creek Channel Restoration

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in streams and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project intending to restore the Devil's Dip Spring Creek stream channel, which would include reconnection to Nevada Spring Creek and attainment of complete fish passage through the restored reach. The adjacent pond and wetland areas would be isolated to reduce warm water inputs.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on Devil's Dip Spring Creek, a tributary to Nevada Spring Creek in the Blackfoot River drainage, within Township 13 North, Range 11 West, Section 11 in Powell County (Figure 1). It is located about 3 miles south of the intersection of MT Highways 200 and 141 near the town of Lincoln.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species and to ensure angling opportunities whenever possible." By implementing habitat restoration projects through the FFIP, this critical goal can be achieved. This project could create additional habitat and nursery areas for species currently occupying Nevada Spring Creek, potentially including westslope cutthroat trout.

Westslope cutthroat trout are native to Montana and designated as a "Species of Concern." They are also listed as sensitive under the Endangered Species Act.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project would restore Devil's Dip Spring Creek to the appropriate dimensions, pattern, and profile through natural channel design (C-type spawning stream) and would isolate it from the adjacent pond, which affects stream habitat and temperature (Figure 2). Fish passage would be improved by replacing the road prism water control structure with an appropriately sized culvert. The spring creek would be reconnected to Nevada Spring Creek, and a grazing management plan

would be implemented to protect the riparian area. This project would obtain the proper permits for construction.

The total estimated cost for this project is \$30,310. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$8,500. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Landowner	\$5,425	
US Fish and Wildlife Service		\$10,000
Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited	\$3,150	\$3,235
TOTAL = \$21,810		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Devil's Dip Spring Creek Channel Restoration

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for restoration of the Devil's Dip Spring Creek stream channel, which would include reconnection to Nevada Spring Creek and uninhibited fish passage through the restored reach. The adjacent pond and wetland areas would be isolated to reduce warm water inputs.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			X

9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		X
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Devil's Dip Spring Creek as a result of the proposed project. Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization).

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

This project would restore the stream channel and reconnect it with Nevada Spring Creek, which would disturb vegetation in the riparian area during construction. However, the affected area would be revegetated appropriately. Long-term impacts are considered positive and would enhance natural riparian function.

7. Terrestrial and aquatic life habitats.

Construction activities that will affect aquatic life habitats will be short term. Impacts would be confined to the project area and be related to reconstruction of the channel,

including the use of construction equipment to shape the channel into the correct dimension, pattern, and profile. The contractors would preserve existing quality habitat when practical and revegetate or restore when necessary. Because the project site is currently degraded, the impact to existing aquatic life may be minimal. Long term, this project may greatly increase the amount of aquatic habitat through increased connectivity, survival, and overall stream and riparian health.

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.

This project would affect westslope cutthroat trout, a species that is federally recognized and designated "Species of Concern" in Montana. The impacts on this species as a result of this project are predicted to be positive, potentially increasing recruitment and survival.

9. Introduction of new species into an area.

Although this project involves the reconnection of streams and would likely open new suitable habitat, the species are not new to the area. This project involves restoring westslope cutthroat trout habitat, not introducing new species into the Nevada Creek drainage.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

Reconnecting Devil's Dip Spring Creek to Nevada Spring Creek should increase stream connectivity by creating additional suitable habitat for fish species currently residing in Nevada Spring Creek. This impact is considered positive and could increase the abundance of fish in Devil's Dip Spring Creek and the Nevada Creek drainage.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of this project and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the existing impaired section of

Devil's Dip Spring Creek would remain untouched and disconnected from Nevada Spring Creek.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore a section of stream that has been disconnected from Nevada Spring Creek. The project would reconnect the stream and provide uninhibited fish passage through the restored reach. The adjacent pond and wetland areas would be isolated to reduce warm water inputs. This project could increase available habitat for westslope cutthroat trout.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

North Powell Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: www.fwp.mt.gov.

5. Duration of comment period?

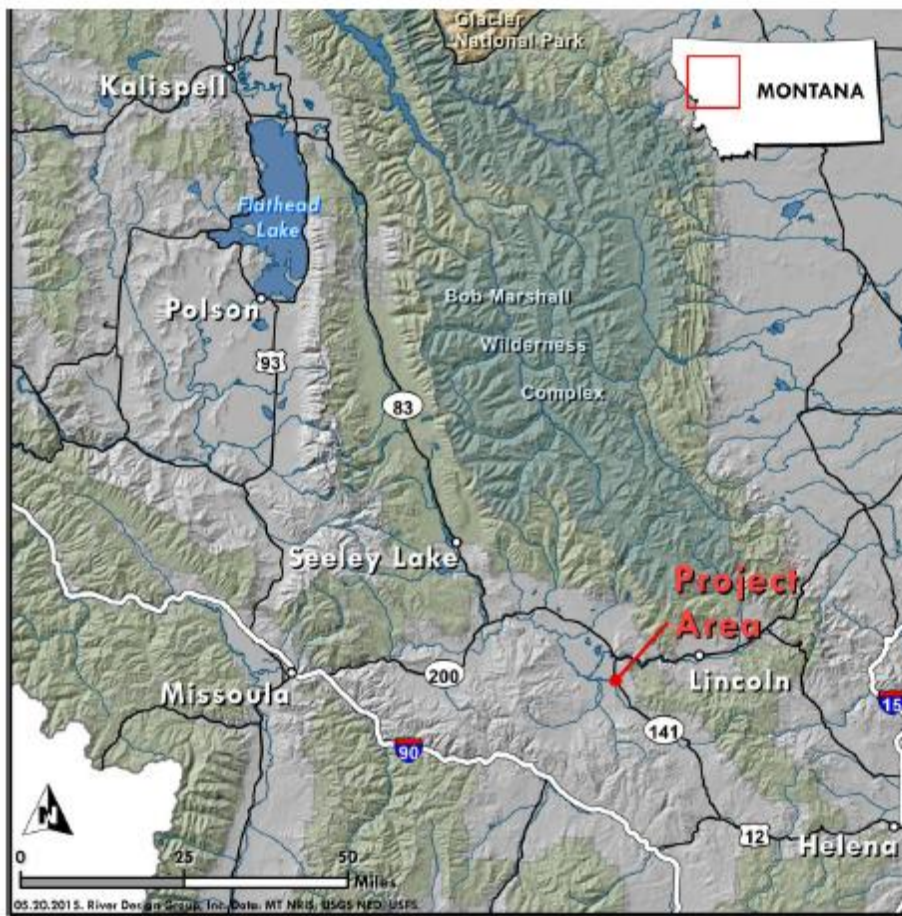
Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on August 12, 2015.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
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Helena, MT 59620
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Contributor: Ryen Neudecker, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited

FIGURE 1



Project Vicinity Map

From the intersection of MT Highway 200 and MT Hwy 141, travel south approximately 2.8 miles to a ranch road on the right (west) side of the highway. Go thru the gate, project is about 0.15 miles at the bottom of the hill.

FIGURE 2

